Spectrum 2005
Literary and Fine Arts Magazine

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Literary and Arts Magazine

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2005 Spectrum Staff

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Spectrum is supported by funding from Villa Julie's English and Art Departments.

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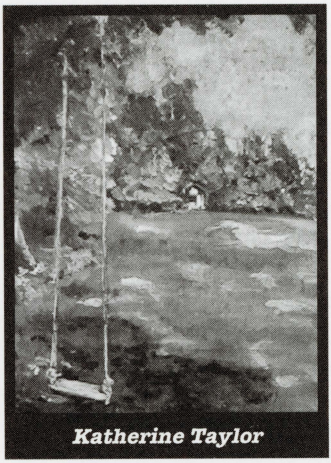


Katherine Taylor

Kayla Sees the Season

Kayla Pie, Kayla Pie. Look into the
Ocean's glow. See the warmth of the sun's shine.
Dance, go ahead, feel the rhythm of the
Breeze. Taste the swirl-like grooves of humid air.

Open your eyes to the blues and whites that
Fill the view all around you. Oh Kayla,
You are smelling the ocean's perfume. It
Engulfs the air with laughter and wet leaps.

Do you see the ropes meant for jumping, and
The boats for you to sail the sea upon?
Oh, to go where the darkness will meet the
Daylight and decide which to partake in.

Oh, young unknowing Kayla, whose virgin
Toes feel the heated sand between them and
Tongue lies on iced cream so unaware of
What transformations it must undergo.

You are experiencing endless days
And careless nights that can be described as
No less than bliss, nirvana, utter
Paradise. You are encountering summer.

Airielle Lee

Double Dutch

The dizzying whirls of conversation fly through the air as I try to jump into the game.
I stand on the edge of the circle too frightened to leap in yet yearning to be part of it.

I watch the rhythm of discussion;
Turn taking,
Twists of conversation,
In and out,
Back and forth,
From giggles to gossip.
The swaying motion of body movement and body language,
Speakers quickly sharing,
Communicating,
Excluding me as they gather around the ropes
Of rumor.

I gather my courage to throw
Myself in the conversation only to feel the sting of blank looks and
Superior stares as the rope slaps my face.

I stumble back out embarrassed, bruised, and defeated.
My words hang in the air like the rope around my neck....
As the smack slap of the unrelenting rope of words winds on.
Melissa Anderson

6

Nick Needle

Spelling B

"How do you spell miscellaneous?" Why did she have to ask that word? That WORD. Of all the words in the entire world, why did she have to pick that word to need to know?

"Err, umm," I stammered as I mopped at the sweat trickling from my brow. "Miscellaneous?"

"Uh, yeah!" She snapped.

"Miscellaneous..." My mind was reeling. I was back on the stage at my grade school. In front of EVERYONE. I had made it. Susan Quisnowski, affectionately known as Suzie Q, and I were left. Suzie Q got her word correct, anti-disestablishment, and now it was My Turn.

"The word is, Miscellaneous."

"Can you use it in a sentence?" I asked with a quaver of excitement in my voice. I knew this word. I had studied it, smelled it, felt it, tasted it, heard it, and spelled it. Forwards. Backwards. This was My Word.

"The book was found in a miscellaneous section of the store, filled with all of the odds-and-ends."

"Thank you. Miscellaneous. M-I-S-..." This was my big moment. My Chance. All of my hard work and effort was finally going to pay off. "C-E-L..." Is it one L or two? It's one. NO! Wait it's two! "A-N-E-..." I saw the smug smile on Suzie Q's face. The laughing mocking eyes that bore into my head. Just finish the word I told myself. "O-U-S. MISCELLANEOUS." The tears were welling up behind my eyes. My Chance. GONE.

"I'm sorry that is incorrect. Susan now has a chance to win. If she successfully spells miscellaneous, she will win the competition." Suzie Q stood up, with that same smile plastered to her face. Pigtails in pink bows with yellow polka dots. I saw her mouth move. I watched it form the letters spelling the word. My Word. The word I had breathed and tasted and felt in my bones. My Chance. GONE.

"Susan, that's correct! You've won the competition! Congratulations!" My Congratulations. My Word. My Chance. GONE...

"Come on! How do you spell miscellaneous?"

"I don't know. I just write M-I-S-C Period."

Glenn Klug

Katherine Taylor

Memories

My niece wants me to color a picture for her mommy;
She hands me the Crayola box and asks me to pick a color.
I open the box and the familiar waxy smell drifts up;
I reach for a periwinkle blue crayon, small in my grown up hand.
I give the crayon to her and she begins to draw.
It is then I remember, sitting in a first grade class,
Students all around me, all involved in their own artistic worlds.

The teacher walks around, wiry glasses on her nose,
her hair in a bun,
praising each child's work.

Mine is a park with a vast, blue sky.

Recess, story time, and then more coloring
The periwinkle crayon never leaves my side.
When the students finish, each masterpiece is taped to the empty wall.
Each child smiles proudly, excited for everyone to see their work.
The wall is decorated with a collage of colorful drawings,
a collage of happy memories.
"Look at this!" my niece calls to me,
waking me from my reminiscences.
I look at her drawings of a huge blue ocean,
her favorite spot in the summer.
Another moment captured in periwinkle blue.

Audrey Brooks

8 The Wanderer

For my Friend who Wanders, capturing the love of children, horses, dogs, and other romantics.

There are few that know him now. Small children smile when they see him, and horses still themselves in respect. Intuitive women stare, wondering why he seems so familiar, like a warm image from a long-forgotten dream. But most think nothing of him, an old man with graying hair.

Long ages ago, in the time of his youth, there was no need for Wandering. All who met him knew him then. They saw the warmth in his smile and felt the healing in his words. He didn't have to fight indifference or disbelief then. Those he served believed in him and loved him as much as he believed in and loved them.

Then time passed, and the world changed. Parents forgot to teach their children about him, and they came to regard him with suspicion. He became lost to the people that needed him most. He began to realize that he would need to Wander forever, searching for a way to awaken hearts forced to sleep by betrayal and fear.

Hope was a word he could hardly remember. But he could never do what was expected of him; he could never give up and leave humanity to its faithlessness. All the others like him had already gone, but he knew too well the potential for kindness and strength, beneath what came easiest.

So he started conversations in coffee shops. He talked to mothers whose infants laughed and reached out for him in grocery stores. He told children stories, returned lost dogs, and made friends with painters. He would use only enough power to make the people he met trust him quickly; if he used too much of his strength too soon, it would frighten them, although he meant to save them, and their trust would turn to hatred.

He saw the hate coming from the ice that surrounded their hearts and from their fear of all power. Because they felt that power didn't truly exist, they could no longer tell the difference between him and another that could do them great harm, and they often mistook one for the other.

But every once in a while, someone would take a second look. They might not have intended it, but they let their guard down. First they saw just a normal man, looking perhaps in his late fifties or early sixties. Then they would look again and realize that he was in fact ageless. If they were lucky enough to see him smile or hear him laugh, they'd hear the faith and happiness of the countless people he loved, echoing through him. If they were more fortunate still and looked into his eyes, they would see all his love and compassion, stretching away beyond time.

And so he Wandered. He looked for those he could help. He whispered to people, dispelling their fears and showing them how to take away the power of destruction. He made bitter men and women love again. He made every person he touched see how much good they could do and how they could do it.

Heidi Shepler

Depression/*Aaron Kuhn*

Karen Michael

Dollhouse Perspective

The golden silence is broken by the tread of small feet.

I brace myself as her fingers grasp me,
pulling my hair,
lifting my skirts,
twisting my limbs.

The minutes tick by and then the torture is over.
I wait patiently,
smile never fading
from my porcelain cheeks,
until tomorrow
when playtime comes again.

Lindsay Payne

Across the Room

That girl across the way
with glasses on; I think she may
look over here
at any time—and that's my fear.
I must be ready for that glance.
My head so steady, I'll take the chance
to look—so look for goodness sake,
even though I'm sure you'd make
a pompous ass take pride
in being such, so run and hide
behind your book.
And so I sighed
and missed her look.

Evan Preese

Play Nice

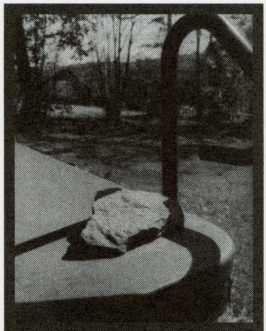
Oh, how we can play nice,
And pretend that we like to talk to each other,
Ask the conversational things like,
"How was your weekend?"
Sit and complain to one another.
But whenever we meet,
The vicious cycle
Becomes like an addiction
That you tell yourself every day you are going to quit.

Then when we are close to each other,
We play "I avoid you, you avoid me"
By not going to the familiar spots
Where our paths may meet.

So, until the next time I see you,
I'll play nice,
Like I do not remember,
What you said,
How your words fazed me,
And how I listened to your worthless excuses,
And pretended I was really listening
To the lies.

So, until the next time we meet,
I'll play my role as the caring friend,
And you'll play your role as the nice guy, which
You know so well.

Because that is what we do;
We are co-actors in our world
Where the scene never changes much,
Just the lines, with the usual theme,
"Play Nice."
De'Anne Roye



Karen Michael

Heart Burn

Insurgent dreams
Arrest my mind
Take me back
Lift me up
Slam me down

My breath
Quakes
Like a wounded
Sore
Broken
Yet again

I fall
My arms strike
Less than soothing ground
Flaying my eyes
With shiny shards
Of decay

I am wrapped
In sticky soil
Stacked amongst
The weeds
Bedraggled
Decisions
Turned wrong
Glass spewing
From the mixture

My corpse
Is hollow
The air
Of dirt
Suffocates my lungs
As the worms
Ingest my
Soul

Amanda Beherns

Confession

I'm sorry.
If you want to know
why I never told you,
the answer is only too simple:
fear.
I should have known
I've nothing to fear from you.
But love makes cowards of us all.
Even those that value courage.
I wished my whole life for love,
selfishly—
I didn't understand
that love is endless giving
and joy and pain
and comfort and peril.

I never asked to love you,
resisted when I knew,
such beautiful chaos.
When did your laugh
become so intoxicating?
You really don't play fair,
always reminding me
of how wonderful you are.
But truly,
though it sounds impossible to believe,
I love you.

Heidi Shepler

Sappho's Lover

Are you forgetting me?
What will your eyes say
When next we meet?

I wait, tremulous.

Speak to me from
Depths of blue.
Do I see love or my
Own pale reflections?
R. Niven Armentrout

Storm

There is grief worse than this, I know.
My grief seems paltry next to, say,
the death of a child or a family wiped away
by flood or politics.
Still, it is my grief, heavy as thunder.

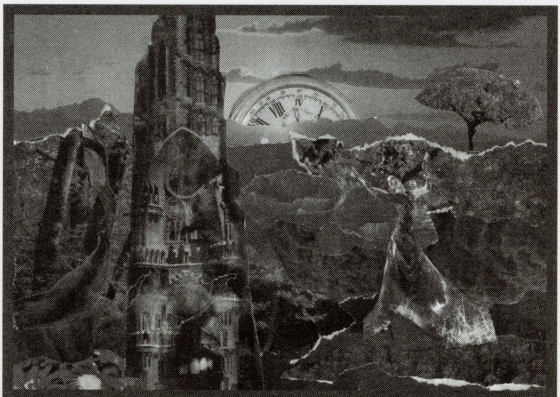
Be patient, when the storm passes
I will come back to myself.
R. Niven Armentrout

Blindstory

See how carefully I have constructed my edifice.
With great skill created an elaborate façade
to protect the contents of my cornerstone.
There are no windows for prying eyes...
or light

I am the caryatid, the keystone.
When the earthquake comes
Do not stand so near.
R. Niven Armentrout

Popcorn/*Elizabeth Brotzman*



Persephone/Elizabeth Brotzman

Heat Lightning

In the bed of his Chevy pickup truck
the humidity licks their skin,
from which each touch becomes
doughy, adhesive. Yellow, blue,
and red project upon their faces
distorting cheek bones, jaw lines,
and just perfect make-up.
And though the radio is tuned
to the drive-in movie, the
soft scent of her freshly
shaved legs and pomegranate body
spray smothers the trumpeting
voices that press through the speakers.

An hour ago their mothers
had warned them about this.
Their speeches beginning with,
good girls, and *good boys*, and
Ending with, *just don't.*

But heat lightning begins
to soar across the sky
while the cicadas rattle
faster and closer through
the static, summer air,
and the taste of strawberry
lip gloss tingles their tongues.

Alison Amato

14 A Bittersweet Return

Kara Lowery sat quietly, lost somewhere in her own thoughts, as the sleek black vehicle carried her down the slightly bumpy gravel roads of her hometown. Mobile, Alabama, never seemed to change much, even in the six years that she'd been gone. Each visit home held the same comfy feel for her, the same familiar scent of the overgrown woods that surrounded her backyard, the same trickling cacophony of the nearby brook that lulled her to sleep as a child. This town had afforded her a comfort and security that she knew could never be replaced, especially not in her new home in upstate New York. There was something about this town that brought her a sweet serenity. She had a feeling that this homecoming, however, would not be like those in previous years. Things sure had changed—and not for the better.

A classic oldies station played softly in the background of her scattered thoughts. She was fumbling with the white rosebud clip holding back her auburn curls when suddenly she heard a tune that tugged at an old, yet quite familiar, heartstring. "Unchained Melody" softly permeated the air—so softly, in fact, that most likely no one else even recognized the soothing lyrics. But for Kara, just the first two lines had already removed her from the present, gently transporting her back in time.

She could still recall exactly how Brett looked that night, though a decade had passed since the moment she was now relishing and reliving. Even at 18, he had a mature appearance. His look drew others to him—it was as if some type of magnetic force absorbed the attention of those around him. Whether he was wearing a t-shirt and cutoffs or a Gucci tux, he was a vision of perfection to most women. Kara knew that she was the envy of the town when Brett approached her to dance to the Righteous Brothers' melody. That dance, although brief, was the precursor to the most amazing year of her life.

As the song continued to play on the car radio, Kara's mind was filled with the feelings of love and adoration that grew in her heart for Brett that first year, and yet also with the heartbreak that followed the next summer. Kara could still feel the sharp sting of tears in her eyes the night Brett broke the devastating news that indelibly shaped the next years of her life. She could see both the pain and the pride in his eyes as he explained how enlisting in the Army paid well and he felt that this was his duty to his family. His loyalty was something she loved about him, yet at that moment it was hard to disguise her disappointment.

A jagged pothole in the road caused the car to thump rigidly, bringing Kara abruptly back. "It's amazing," she thought to herself, "how one song can bring such a flood of memories back." She smiled once more at the thought of Brett in his crisp blue uniform the day he left, and then dismissed the thought with a brief sigh.

By now, the car had arrived at a tall, white chapel. Kara held her daughter's hand as they entered the church and took their seats near the front. It was comparatively empty for a Sunday morning. As Kayla paged through a red leather-

bound hymnal, Kara intensely studied the stained-glass windows and stone figures. White, yellow and purple lilies were tied with yellow ribbons on every pew, much like the lilies that adorned these pews a little over six years ago, and much like those that had been interspersed so splendidly with the daisies in her bouquet.

Brett hadn't been home long from his deployment to the Gulf when he asked Kara to be his bride. In fact, he had been saving up his extra pay for months before he returned home, and within a week of arrival he had chosen the perfect ring that he was sure Kara would adore.

Kara looked down at the beautiful glistening diamond on her left ring finger, and her heart was at once flooded with a memory of the crowded chapel. Even more lucid was the vision of Brett waiting at the end of the aisle. She always loved his smile, and even now, she could not recall seeing it as big as it was that rainy mid-August afternoon. For a second time, the tears were stinging at her eyes, but this time, they were tears of joy at the reminiscence.

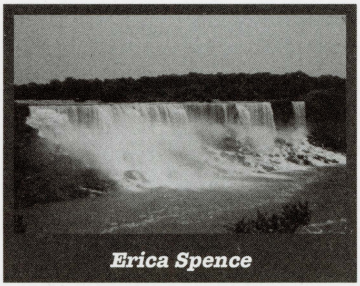
Kara was only slightly startled by the sound of the organ pounding out a heavy melody and a man at the front addressing the now plentiful congregation. She decided that her memories were more entertaining and pertinent than this church service could ever be, and she once again lost herself in thoughts of the past. A montage of images preoccupied her—the memories that were with her all morning had suddenly diminished to snapshots of smiles and tears, ups and downs.

A commotion startled her back to reality. Kayla led her outside, completely oblivious to everything except her favorite butterfly bracelet, given to her this past birthday. Kara smiled at the way Kayla refused to take it off—because it was her daddy's "special gift" to her, to remind her of him while he was away. Brett had been around for most of Kayla's life, until he was shipped to the Sandbox on a longer deployment than any of them had expected.

Kara stepped through the grass, and the feel of the breeze against her face reminded her of the last time she had seen Brett. It was six months ago, and she recalled those stinging tears once more. These tears had been so much worse than any of the times, and they lasted much longer; so much uncertainty had clouded this departure. She remembered also the tears she could see in Kayla's eyes that day, as she, too, was losing the most important man in her life. Brett had hugged and kissed them both and promised to come home to them very soon. Then he quickly turned and boarded the plane.

The cruel reality hit Kara, as she watched Kayla fiddle with her bracelet in front of the slate stone that bore the name of Brett Lowery...he *had* come home, yet none of their lives would ever be the same. And Kara felt the tears stinging at her eyes once more, as she walked away with Kayla to start a new chapter of her life.

Amanda Gobble



Erica Spence

Sailing

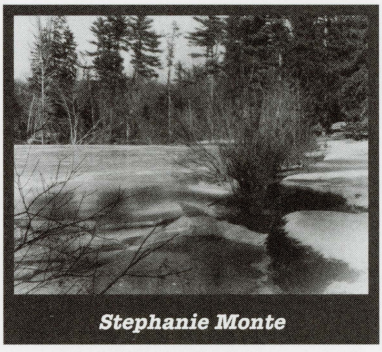
What is there to say to you
when you have planned your course?
I should protest and scream and plead,
for the water's too rough to sail.

Yet I stand back, face to the wall,
while you gather your possessions to leave.
Is there nothing I can do to make you notice
the harsh storm out at sea?

So I hold my words and close my eyes.
Tears won't make you stay.
You've chosen your path already,
to venture amongst the waves.

And from the water's blackness,
the world has heard my pain.
I should have held you close to me,
but you desired to sail away.

Amy Thompson



Stephanie Monte

In the End...

Hopes,
like autumn leaves,
fell to the ground.

Dreams,
like soap bubbles,
popped in mid-air.

Wishes,
like wisps of smoke,
faded into nothing.

...Divorced.

Ann Arbaugh

droplet

just then
a tear ran down her face
and rolled along
the curves in her cheekbones
while her pores swallowed up the salt
it landed on her upper lip and hesitated
then, in silence
slid between them
now she can taste sadness

Kitty Anderson

Ashley Judy

Cover Up The King

(An AIDS warning)

I lay dormant within,
Unsuspecting, calculating;
I plan my attack and begin.
You should have covered up the King!

Ten years or so
I give you everything.
All that is opportune will show.
You should have covered up the King!

Now you are weak and spent,
Count the pills, the blood draws sting,
Transfusions for illusions meant.
You should have covered up the King!

You fought hard but lost the war;
I won by giving you everything.
Many will grieve, as you came so far.
You should have covered the King!

No more masked faces or gloved hands,
No more nausea, pain or needle pricking;
Now a space on the Quilt sewn by fans.
Because you didn't cover up the King!

Alas! I've accomplished my task,
Left you ravaged amongst the living.
Now I drink from the victory flask.
You should have covered up the King!

Bonnye Best, RN

Bryan Goetz

Ashley Judy

Caregiver of the Alzheimer's Patient

She wanders in and out of
Her room all night,
Not knowing where she is
Or who she is with,
Worrying and not knowing
What she is worrying about,
Eating and not remembering
That she ate,
Looking for something,
Repeating, repeating, repeating.

She knows something is wrong
And out of her control.
None of us can fix it.

Medication doesn't help.
Careful watching, 24–7
Wears one out
Never a break
No time for self
Existing from minute to minute
Unpredictable
Insomnia and somnolence.

Friends stop by
Don't understand
Can't deal with it
Run!
Alone!

Sandy Levy

A Virgin Lapse of Sweetest Kind

I bring a finger to my lip
Cautiously, think I, as I reach
Forth from the air, ideas to rip,
A pure and carnal bond to each
Sentence, phrase, simile, metaphor
Ev'ry glitt'ring word a lover.

Cent'ries of language on my skin
Struck with longing throughout the night.
Rest, O Mind; day will come again
And the bloody battle to fight,
Word after word, choice after choice
With each breath of page, a new voice.

Through these brutal waters, O Mind,
Ingestion of innocence swims
A virgin lapse of sweetest kind,
Stretching the soul of all my limbs
Within these waters to bathe free,
Caressed by Creativity

Many a night has passed me by—
Stretched as millennia on end—
When my heart does shriek out in cry
That to the page my hand would lend
One more tale of one thousand woes,
For so 'tis in the writer's throes.

Amanda Behrens

Katherine Taylor

Justin Rakowski

Searching in a dream

On down causeways
Through hallways
Into the streets

Rolling Ripping
Spotted like impressionism

Speckled Stars
Corner Bars
Sidestreet Cafés

Mystery streets
Cool Historic Nostalgia

It's through the wild forest
Elder constructs

I will break through
I will realize my lost dream
Remembering my experiences
Builds bittersweet anticipations
Matthew Easter

Battle

The freshness of the rain exhilarates me.
Its wet drops refresh my soul in sweet splendor—
sweet, glorious triumph.
I have won the battle, have I not?
My thunder and lightening have broken the
ever-dominating sky;
My sword and voice have conquered the
sun's tyranny of light.
Yet the rain cries harder, and the stars
hold no shine.
I have won the battle, have I not?
So why does my soul still weep?
Amy Thompson

It still takes some getting used to, to be honest.

Waking up in a foreign country, in a place where home is roughly 4000 miles away, and everyone you "know" is someone you've really only known for two months or so.

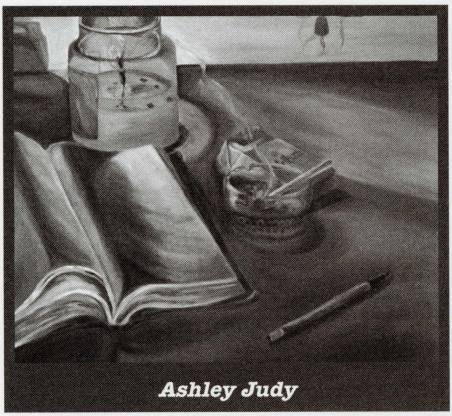
To be honest, it's quite lonely.

You make friends but not really, because you aren't around much and they don't live on campus. You busy yourself with traveling on the weekends, since it's the only opportunity that you'll ever have to do such. You've got school work and classes to fill in the dull weekdays. You don't drink, so you're left alone in the evenings. Maybe you should start?

It's hard to stay true to yourself here. It's easy to become someone else—no one knows who you used to be, right? But being the way you were was just fine before. So why do you need to change *now*?

You want to connect, to find someone to befriend, someone to tell secrets to.

Instead you fall in love, and you never intended to. What happened to the wild reckless lovers you imagined, with their sensuous British accents and their dreamy dark hair and eyes? But he's perfect, isn't he? Damn straight, he is.


Ashley Judy

You manage to meet people you never could have found elsewhere. You learn things you never would have thought possible. You see the things you thought you could only ever imagine seeing. You reach the epitome of all that you thought you could never be, and things seem absolutely perfect.

And maybe they are.

But you still miss home. And you still miss your family. And your friends. And your car.

Walking should be a crime. But what other choice do you have in this busy and compact city? Walk and triumph or wait and fail.

The people can get to you; the city is full of pickpockets, or so they tell you at every single orientation meeting. Clutching your purse, you eye every person that brushes past you or looks the least bit shady. Homeless people seem to tackle you everywhere, and you've actually given in to one for the first time in your life.

You miss McDonald's. You miss 24-hour stores. You miss Wal*Mart. You miss America.

You're growing though, every day. You are becoming more independent, more stable, stronger. Your procrastination seems slightly more under control, and you can actually start papers days before they're due.

You have a new sense of academic duty; you do the readings. You contemplate their meanings. You highlight passages, underline others. You actually seem to know what you're talking about.

You're becoming one of those useless information people—those random characters who seem to know the most trivial details about a certain object or activity.

You're addicted to chocolate. But it's okay because every single British person is more addicted. Thank goodness.

You can't remember what a stroller is called, because it's a pram here. You refer to everything the way the British do, and your friends back home are left clueless when you get caught up in the language.

You want to live here forever. You want to import Wal*Mart because it is the greatest creation on earth. You want petrol to cost less. You want to own the tiniest car that they sell here, the SMART car. You want to know how to drive a stick shift.

You wish the conversion rate meant you had more money, and not less.

You don't want to live in London forever. You don't want to become so accustomed to riding the Tube that you can do it without gripping the railing. You don't want to be marked forever as being an American simply because of your accent.

You want to explore the rest of Europe, since everyone else seems to have already done it. You want people to not envy you just because you have an expensive MP3 player. You want to figure out how they wear those stiletto heels on the cobblestone walkways.

Maybe someday you'll figure out how to ride the bus; for now, it is something to be avoided at all costs.

You want to avoid run-ins with various guards who appear to be dressed in a silly manner but could actually probably behead you if given the chance. And get away with it, too.

You want to be a tourist and not a Londoner, but you want to be a Londoner and not a tourist.

You want the best of both worlds.

Jaimee Wecker

Carly Pettingill

Autumn

The leaves dangle in the large oak trees
A swirl of colors: crimson, olive, yellow, and carroty orange
The blustery wind tumbles the leaves to the ground
Small piles build up on the grassy knolls
Children's clumsy leaps cause the leaves to stir
Autumn is in the air
Audrey Brooks

Autumn Harvest

Fox, beside the road
Adrift in a bed of leaves
Bleeds a red silence
R. Niven Armentrout

Where Are You?

It's such a November day.
Like many I've forgotten before
Wintry gusts greet and remember
Bleeding leaves drip to the ground and hang lonely
Stale summer memories sail through my mind.
Matthew Easter

Baltimore Haiku

A spring rain, cool breeze
wakes wind chimes, in the distance
the scream of sirens
R. Niven Armentrout

Mosquito

sitting in the darkness bright screen
staring at me "tell me what you feel" it
says the cellar door is best kept closed
but it pries at the rusty lock "those
feelings are behind shut doors," I say
"for good reasons" you seem to ignore.
Sarah Snyder

Broken

Amputate then!
These wings are broken beyond repair
And I have lost my desire to fly.
R. Niven Armentrout

26 The Sensualizers

Somewhere in the Baltimore, Maryland, of the 22nd Century...

Burton McCohen was 30 years old, stood 6-feet tall, and weighed about 170 pounds. He had short black hair, brown eyes, and a beard. He had a wife, Alex, who was also 30, had long blonde hair and blue eyes, and a son, Lucas, 9, who was cut more from the mold of his father than his mother.

They lived in the O'Malley Outpost, one of the largest outposts to house human beings during the Second Ice Age, as it was called. Their home was an average sized apartment, just one of many, that consisted of two bedrooms—one for the parents, one for the son—a bathroom and a living room that connected into the dining room. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner consisted of a balanced diet of meats and grains that were grown in the outpost's artificial farm areas. Occupations in the outposts consisted of heating engineers—the ones who kept the underground heating pipes that went down into the Earth to feed off of the planet's inner heat, teachers, theater actors (who often complained that the theater complexes that ran reruns of old movies stole their thunder), food handlers, and Guardsmen.

Burton McCohen was a Guardsman. He was one of the "legalized thugs" who fought to keep order in the outpost, namely against the Sensualists. The Sensualists were a group of eccentrics who demanded that Sensualizers, devices created by the governments of the outposts as a means of interrogating criminals, be made legal and open to the public. After the Sensualizers were no longer needed, someone in the outpost government decided to give them to the public as a way of distracting them from the bleak pain of living in the frozen wasteland that had overcome the Earth.

The problem with Sensualizers was that overuse could cause serious harm; Burton's own father had become paralyzed below the waist from overusing a Sensualizer, and he was one of the lucky ones. The worst cases of Sensualizer abuse usually led to people losing their thought processes and being left as living vegetables. Others ended up killing themselves from overloading their senses with the heightened pains or pleasures they couldn't live without. It was like a mechanical drug.

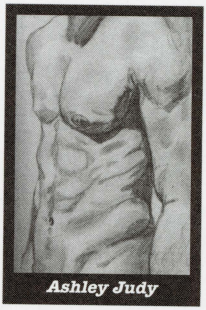
To make things worse, Burton had caught Lucas using one. Since then, Burton and his son were on thin ice; it angered him no end that his son didn't understand the danger of a Sensualizer, even after seeing what it had done to his grandfather, and it angered him even more that he couldn't seem to make Lucas understand that using a Sensualizer could lead to death.

That morning breakfast passed quietly, as it had for the last few weeks since Burton had found out about the Sensualizer. Burton ate his usual small steak, toast, eggs, and bacon with artificially produced milk and went on his way without exchanging a word with his wife or son except to say that he would be back around midnight.

Burton usually took the subway system that had been created for transportation in the outpost, and this morning was the same as any other. He usually spent the subway ride sleeping so that he would have more natural energy when he got to work. Natural energy was the best kind for a Guardsman, especially if a riot broke out.

When he got to work he was greeted by the usual familiar faces of workers with whom he'd been collaborating the last few years. The department was full of tall men and

tall women, mostly white and black, only a few tall Hispanics and maybe one tall Asian. The squad leader was actually a solidly built, Arab named Vic Sharif. There were two very strict height requirements involved in applying for Guardsman positions—all men had to be at least six feet tall and all women had to be at least five foot seven, and all were required to undergo rigorous physical training (running, weightlifting, strength-training, self-defense) for the job. These rules were installed at the insistence of two psychologists, Dr. VD Cronenberg and Dr. Seth Bronson, both who had done studies that "proved" that when criminals (or rioters or troublemakers or whatever the right term was) were confronted with authority figures, they generally responded (i.e. were more likely to surrender) to taller, bigger, more imposing men and women than to shorter, thinner, more lightly built people. Tim Cross, a heating engineer who was a friend of Burton's, had been rejected for Guardsmen service because, at 5'9", the muscular Cross was considered too short.


Ashley Judy

Burton was one of the few Guardsmen who actually had a family; most of the other men and women who worked there led lonely lives, with a few pairs occasionally latching onto each other in a pseudo-romantic fashion. Most of the Guardsmen were socially inept "misfits" who didn't quite fit in with the rest of the people who lived in the outpost. Leon lived with his Hispanic heating engineer girlfriend, Melanie Miranda.

"How've things been?" asked Leon as he and Burton filled out reports.

"Not that great," replied Burton. "I still can't seem to get through to Lucas about that damned Sensualizer."

"Do you have any idea how he got the damned thing?"

"None."

Burton hung his head. This was not the time or the place where he wished to dwell on how he had failed to explain to Lucas the dangers of Sensualizers.

"Sorry man," said Leon.

Burton was about to ask Leon to leave him alone for a while when the riot alarm went off.

"Hey, hey, hey..." hummed Geoffrey Broom, a bald, burly black man with a deep bass voice who sat at the desk adjacent to theirs, "...they're playing our song."

Guardsmen uniforms were dark green jumpsuits that were custom-fit with black bullet-proof body armor padding on the knees, arms, chest, shoulders, and black helmets with clear visors, taser clubs and riot shields. The image of a growling polar bear with blood dripping from its teeth adorned their shields and arm bands.

Ten minutes after the riot alarm went off, more than a hundred Guardsmen were geared up and heading down to the Southeast sector of the outpost, were yet another Sensualist riot had broken out.

It was an ugly sight, and no matter how many times a riot broke out, none of the Guardsmen ever got completely used to it. A large crowd of people—more than seventy—of varying sizes, ages and races chanted and held up signs demanding the legalization of Sensualizers. They also carried bricks, clubs, chains, broken bottles, and knives.

28

None of them appeared to be stable.

"This is where it gets messy," sighed Burton.

"Isn't the mess part of why we're in it?" quipped Jack Davison, who stood on Burton's right while Leon was on his left.

Once the rioters caught sight of the Guardsmen it didn't take long for them to attack. The wave of rioters broke against the front line of Guardsmen, their various blunt weapons raining down on the Guardsmen riot shields. Standing tall and firm, the Guardsmen used their shields as battering rams to push the rioters back, and for each club or brick that scratched a riot shield, there was a taser on the other end to electrocute the assaulting rioter.

The only thing worse than a riot was breaking up a riot, as the Guardsmen proved once again on this day as they fought to subdue the rioters. Not all of the Guardsmen emerged unscathed. Lauren Caulk got jumped by a male rioter who tried to tear off her helmet and bite her neck, only to be subdued by Leon when he pulled the rioter off of Caulk's back and started beating him to the ground with his riot shield. Nicholas McConnell actually lost his riot shield and was wrestled to the ground by a rioter, who cut up his face rather badly while trying to gouge his eyes out with a broken beer glass; he was saved only by the joint efforts of Burton, Leon, and Linda Prescott, each carrying two taser sticks and double jolting the rioters. Burton himself was almost bludgeoned by a couple of brick throwers, but got away with a few bruises.

After subduing the rioters, the Guardsmen had to divide them up between the prison and the Anti-Sensualization Centers that treated people who were either victims of Sensualizers or were addicted to them. Burton and Leon had the misfortune of transporting one very eccentric Sensualist, later identified as Evan Keyser, who kept ranting about his girlfriend or "mate" as he called her, supposedly a young woman called the Organic. Keyser, a short, stout young man with short brown hair, greenish- blue eyes and a hyperactive demeanor, explained that the Organic was a woman who could find the nature-based origin of any object and cause vegetation to sprout from it. He even went so far as to show them a picture of her—what they found were some pictures of a young woman with long, curly brown hair, lying naked on a bed with artificial flowers covering her breasts and jammed between her legs. Burton and Leon tore up the pictures in disgust and hit Keyser over the head so hard he was still unconscious when they put him in his cell.

"Sick cretin...," muttered Leon. "Probably a masochist."

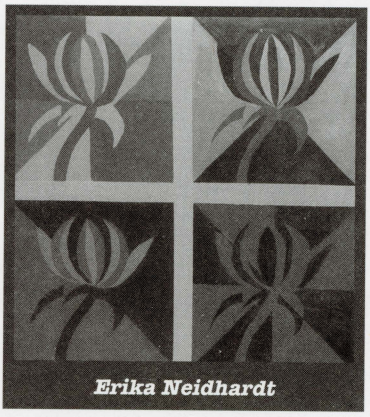
"Him or the girl in those pictures?" asked Burton.

"They're probably both masochists."

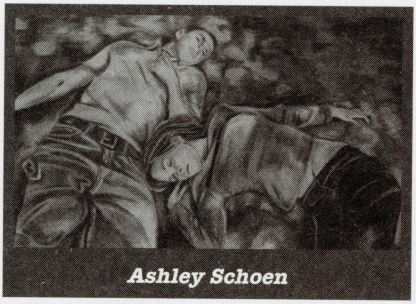
Burton and Leon spent the rest of the day filling out reports. When their reports were finished, they went out for a drink and then parted ways, going home after midnight.

The next day was the same as usual.

Bill Taylor



Erika Neidhardt



Ashley Schoen

49 in a 30

Late night wind rushing past, matching my mood,
Made me feel exhilarated. All had
Gone well for me fifteen minutes before;
I felt superhuman—like a king.
Nothing would stand in the way of heavenly
Joy. *Unstoppable* was the word. *Making*
Good time! And then, I spotted the prowler
In the distance. *Slow down, do not get*
Excited or panic! However, it was
Too late for I had been spotted by the man.
I stopped and waited as blinding lights
Glared into my eyes, and finally
The man came by and branded me
A delinquent, bearing the paper work
To prove it. All was done and I went away.

One thing kept ringing in my mind, a phrase
That the man had used, *Forty-nine in a thirty.*
In the blink of an eye, fate had twisted
And there were no longer knights in shining
Armor to protect me from life. Now,
I was an outlaw—a rebel without
A cause—and no one would need to know.

Paul Oakes

Waning Lunacy

Poised vigilant in a useless position
Life, ranked and numbered by condition
Stifled innovation
Lies waiting in bureaucratic metamorphism
Only to be forgotten in time
Beliefs die
Energy subsides
Grow up
You are one of us now.
Matthew Easter

Angel Princess

She waltzed around the room with some hidden intent that nobody could see or understand.... And he stared at her with a sort of sorrowful hope. Hope of what? She couldn't tell, but something didn't seem right. She snatched her hand out of the air as if some invisible forces were about to steal it from her own grasp.... Did you see that twinkle in her eyes? Did you feel the magick she tried to push aside?

Well, probably nobody did. But if you did you would realize why they were sympathetic. "Oh God," she screams. Then calmly, regaining her sanity, begins dancing all over again. Three steps around the corner, twenty pliés to the car. Quietly she waits (for what, I wonder?), while fumbling with some sort of metallic object. She sits, wishing or praying (for what, I am still not sure). Then painfully she raises her object, lighting a small flame beneath it, and sorrowfully sucks the air in through the petite plastic tube dangling between her lips. Then, just a bit dazed, she thinks, "Oh, how I loved him."

Ah ha! so that's why. Morphing from one emotion to another...panic, rage, sorrow, pain, love, and pain again. I decide to stroll by her car window, peeking inside her world to see what the fuss is about. Seeing me, she smiles gently, with tears streaming from her eyes and wrinkles marking a pain-filled past. She speaks, "Today was the last day. I wish I could've told him I loved him, that I was always his princess."
Sarah Snyder

Ode to a Diabetic

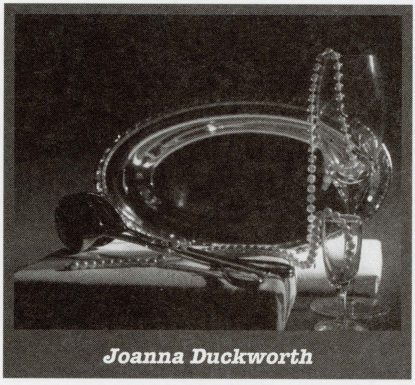
The woman was sweet, eyes
rich and brown
caramel irises
melted around
dark chocolate
centers.

The woman was sweet, hair
the color once
of after-dinner
mint yellow
now the subtle
white of lightly
powdered
powdered sugar.

The woman was sweet, skin
hanging in
loose taffy
folds, soft nougat
flesh turned to
hard brittle
over bone.

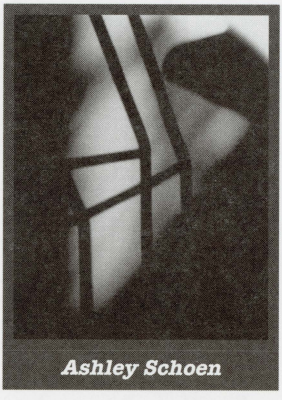
The woman was sweet, blood
that used to flow
clean and red—
sanguine nectar
the needle craves
confectioner's passions
melt in her veins
she is devoured
by her sweet
disposition.

Chris Arellano



Joanna Duckworth

Joanna Duckworth



Ashley Schoen

32 Allies and Enemies

Having just stepped off the private transport, the messenger darted down the overland guard shaft and—stopping just long enough to show the work markings on her left upper leg to the tunnel guard—slid into the restricted-access bypass tunnel that led over the city and directly into the palace. Around her, other Sonori went about their business within the general bypass tunnels woven into a semitransparent network above the city.

Her primary task was being an overland guard, the messenger had only heard of the Sonoril queen. As with many necessary positions, few Sonori coveted overland scouting and patrol, although the messenger would answer that it was better than mining work or waste processing. Despite the bleak outlook painted of an overland guard's rarely exciting life, the messenger preferred it and rated overland guarding much higher than the average Sonorae did. However, the average Sonorae only knew what the overland looked like through their Mothers' art on the old buildings and bridges, the queen's palace, and the great paintings spread across the caverns' ceilings when the higher lights were lit for special days. Going out into the overland was a nice change of pace from Sonoril burrowed life.

She exited the tunnel through the main branch and slipped through the archway into the corridor that led to the throne room. She showed her work marking to a couple more guards before she could approach the queen, who sat in the throne-nest. As the ruler of the Sonori, specially chosen from a clutch of the previous queen and raised for leadership, she bore no personal or work identification markings on her upper legs. Instead, she had a special marking that ran over her upper legs, up her striped neck and over her head to just above her eyes. She waited silently for the meaning of this interruption in her sleep.

The messenger pulled nervously at the bottom of her uniform jacket and focused on keeping her tail from fidgeting. "My Queen, I am Overland Guard Blue 64025," she said, unfastening her sleeve attachment and pulling the top of her sleeve down from her left upper leg to reveal her markings. "Yellow class, from region Kendasonor," she continued, slipping the sleeve back over her shoulder and fastening the strap holding the sleeve to her jacket while she kept her eyes on the leader. "Charged with protecting the Sonori from threat of invasion since the time of our Mothers and the destruction of our Fathers." She relaxed inwardly over her perfect introduction — she made sure to look it up before leaving the Kendasonor guard station so she wouldn't foul it up once she reached the palace. She had long forgotten it since training—after all, who actually expected to use the formal introduction as an overland guard?

"Continue, Guard Blue," her queen responded in like formality.

"We have spent several months tracing the progress of the settlement in our region overland. So far, the new settlers' efforts have been peaceful and they have made no attempt to threaten or even contact the Sonori. However, their most recent activity involves exploring the Entrances within the Kendasonor region. They have not penetrated the outer network nor do they pose an immediate threat, but we fear their curiosity will grow stronger as they explore the Entrances. We await further instruction."

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Except for her eyes, the queen remained motionless. Finally, she spoke again, this time to an attendant. "Show the Guard Blue to a room with the others. You will receive your further instruction soon," she added to the messenger.

The palace servant led her away from the queen to a large room with many archways set in its walls. About six other guards of the same work color sat or stood around the main room, mostly near the fountain in the center. Another came out from one of the archways. Each one fixed her eyes on the newcomer; some flicked out their tongues to catch the scent. The servant showed the messenger which archway led to her nest, then left her with the others in the main room.

The messenger went back through the archway to her nest room. The nest felt comfortable enough—a good deal more than hers at the overland station. She slid her pack off and set it beside the nest. Then she unfastened her jacket, set it beside her pack, and stretched from nose to tail. She straightened her heatpack before going out into the main room.

Most of the others were still there—a couple lounging by the fountain, a couple sitting rigid on the seating mats, one staring out the window into the courtyard below. Their heatpacks, looking like lightweight black under-jackets that left the left upper leg exposed for identification, hid the light grey stripes down their backs and covered their light undersides. The messenger took one of the small bowls from the low table between the mats, filled it at the fountain, and sat on the edge of one of the two long, wide mats—not as rigidly as the other two. After a long time between her last checkpoint and the palace, she was grateful for a quiet drink.

"Hello, Yellow."

The messenger stopped drinking and looked up from her bowl. The one from the window now stood in front of her. Now that she was closer, the messenger could see they both looked alike—the only difference being their work numbers and the intricate styles of their yellow personal markings. "Hello."

"Nice to see a cousin this far out. You from the Delunt region?"

"No; Kendasonor. I was transferred from Delunt when they gave me my profession marking." She set the bowl down. "Sonori I am familiar with call me Marti."

"Koban," the other answered, bowing slightly in Sonoril greeting. "By Sonori I am familiar with, that is. Otherwise, I'm Blue 64083, but you could read that yourself."

"I take it we are all here with the same purpose."

"All of us so far, but we have not yet heard from you." One of the mat-sitting Sonori, marked red, turned and gazed at Marti with sharp black eyes. "What brings you to the queen's city?"

Marti returned her gaze. "I don't believe we've been introduced."

"Overland Guard Blue 49517, Red class, region Trosmaka," she replied before taking a sip from her bowl. "Sonori I am familiar with call me Rilnov."

"64025—Marti," she nodded back. "I am awaiting instruction concerning the recent settlers in my overland region."

"I hope you're ready to wait," Koban said. "I've been here a week."

"And I twice that," Rilnov added. "However, I believe Kendasonor is the last of the settled regions to arrive, so perhaps we will hear something soon from the queen."

"What do you think of these settlers?" Koban asked.

"Personally?" Marti asked. "I've noticed they're different from the ones in our history. For one thing, I count three different main species instead of just one."

"Any slave species among them?" Rilnov lost some of her intimidating front as she spoke, although she addressed Koban rather than Marti.

"Very few, but they're clearly no more intelligent than the animals overland." Koban answered, settling on the floor in front of the mat and tucking her tail around her. "The intelligent ones all work together—I've been on some of the scouting missions at Delunt and saw for myself. Popular opinion at my station is they come from different stars—or wherever other species come from—and are working together for conquest."

"I have read the theory over the networks, but I'm not sure I consider the settlers the conquest type," Marti said."Not in my region, at least. They're more scouts and explorers—terribly interested in the painted chronicles on the entrance tunnels."

"What other type is there? Why come to Kendara except to destroy the rest of us?"

"I do understand Marti's observation," Rilnov offered, stretching out a little more comfortably across her end of the mat. "They're not like all the others we learn about in the histories. My station has observed them irrigating the wide spaces overland and planting food, like the histories say that we did before the Kendarais came and drove us underground after they killed the Fathers. They don't seem to be harming the land or trying to hunt us down for revenge."

"That's what the histories show about the Kendarais before they decided they wanted our planet for themselves. They learned about our land from the Mothers and Fathers before they struck." Koban pulled out a slim, folding linkbook from a pocket in her heatpack and handed it to Marti. "I've been reviewing it over this past week."

"All the same," Marti said, "I hope our orders aren't for immediate annihilation. I'm starting to like these newcomers—more than the last settling conquerors who came to Kendara."

"Doubtful," Koban shrugged. "Immediate annihilation is only reserved for absolutely undoubtedly confirmed Kendarai presence, and it's protected by several other laws against abuse. Trust me, a cousin at my station takes an interest in Sonoril law, and she quotes it for any debate we have. We haven't found evidence of Kendarais, just these newcomers. And some of the intelligent newcomers are similar to us."

"You noticed that at your station, too?" Rilnov asked.

"They're not Sonori—but they're reptilian," she answered. "They have our same similar form, a scale structure close to ours, and I'm pretty sure I've seen some sort of heatpack on them to guard against the weather up there."

"Well, there you have it," Marti said. "They *couldn't* be in league with the Kendarais, because the Kendarais view reptilian species as less than mammalian. You said yourself none of the intelligent ones are slaves to another species in the settlement."

"I'm sorry, Marti," Koban said, "Honestly, I am. But we can't just sit around and wait

for an attack. Look what that did to our ancestors. It's a wonder the Sonori survived."

"At the same time," Marti retorted, "We cannot attack possible allies without reason. I've been on the scouting missions myself—I've seen these people personally. I don't even think they realize we exist, or, at least, that we're still alive and just living below the overland now."

"You lost me, Marti," Rilnov said. "Allies?"

Marti sighed and spoke slowly, just like she did when she got into these debates back at her station. "If they are peaceful, we may convince them to help us. We can use this hide-and-destroy tactic until our star dies and we need more than just a heatpack to warm our blood. Or we can try and build allies, so that *if* the Kendarais do return, we have greater strength. We can't just go around chasing off everyone who comes here—especially when we hide underground ourselves."

The other two Sonori stared puzzled for a full half minute.

"You were seriously assigned the wrong profession, Marti," Koban finally said. "As overland guards, our reports determine whether or not we attack potential settlements."

Marti stood and took her bowl. "With that sort of influence, maybe I was assigned the right profession, after all. It was nice meeting you, but I've just come from a long journey and need some rest." She handed the linkpad back to Koban.

Before she crossed into her nest-room, she heard Koban and Rilnov speaking quietly to each other.

"She's crazy," Rilnov assured. "Potential invaders as allies! It's impossible."

"I don't know," Koban said, turning in the direction of the windows again. "She does make some sense. I'm going to review the other reports from my station again. After reading the histories about generations of defending ourselves, it would be nice to know whether or not we still even have an enemy to defend ourselves from. Have you ever thought, Rilnov, of what it might be like to establish friendly contact with an off-world species?"

Rilnov muttered something about the idealistic Yellow class. Marti ducked through her archway to rest and to compare the histories to current reports. If she could find proof, then maybe there was no need for isolating themselves anymore.

Jesse Badolato

Confession at the Super Market

The left front wheel on
my cart wiggles. This is the
one I always choose. He says
it's because I don't pay
attention, I don't know
what he likes.

*Oreo cookies, apple juice, 1 can
pitted green olives, 12 pack 2 ply
toilet paper, chunky hot salsa*

When we first met, he liked
me to lightly pat his back as
he sipped black coffee. His lip
curled over the rim reaching for
the formula, chapped,
and quivering.

*1 loaf white bread, 2 lbs. bacon,
one dozen extra large eggs, 1 jar
strawberry jam, one jar apricot*

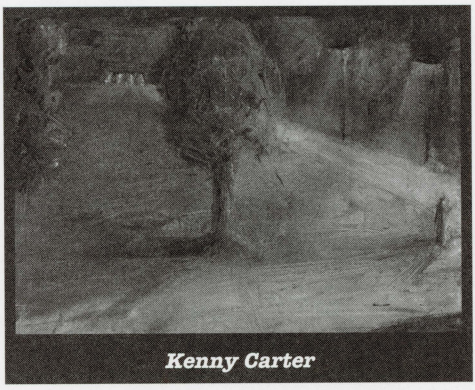
When I married him, we lived
with his mother. She taught
me to cook meatloaf. He likes
meatloaf on Thursdays with
lots of ketchup, with the TV,
with his shoes off, with his slippers on.

*1 jar mayonnaise, sardines, celery,
5 cans tomato soup, macaroni and cheese,
one frozen lasagna, 2 lbs. ground beef*

When his mother passed, I
took a part-time job at the
market. He says I don't pay
attention, I don't know what he
likes. But, *honey*, I said, I *made*
you *meatloaf.* And he said, *Where's the*

*ketchup, bread crumbs, soy sauce
black beans, Frosted Flakes, frozen
peas, chocolate ice-cream, milk*

Alison Amato



Kenny Carter

Katherine Taylor

está bien

It's okay,
you can go
ahead of me
because I see
you're in a hurry—

your baskets
are full of the best
cuts of the best
beef, the freshest

produce over a dollar
a pound and everything
organic because you
don't want your children
exposed to chemicals
from the crops we pick

my basket
cannot hold
enough bleach
to wash away
the blood that flows
too dark and too rich
for your starched tastes.

I take
mi masa, chiles, y tomates
and wait

and wait
for a turn
that never comes.
Chris Arellano

Pow-Wow

He calls her God

damned Indian
squaw, the squall
of his anger—white
foam spills over

me—he
is the rabid
the righteous,
the right
hand man, oh he is
he IS the man
and he acts
as if it were his

rib that sits
in my chest
the heaviness
of being
the fairer sex
turns my blood to lead

and my shoulders slack
with the weight
of his words, flung
across my back,
I, the pack
mule I kick
dirt onto the fire.
Chris Arellano

Laura Schaefer

38 The Last Straw

"Come on, Miss Nelson. The kids are gone for two weeks! Wahoo!" Natalie walked toward Becky Nelson, doing a scary victory dance with awkward foot movements and spastic hand gestures above her head. "I *know* it isn't the holiday party that has you in this funk. That was probably the least chaotic party we've had. I was especially impressed by how well *your* kids behaved, considering you had no extra help." Natalie saw Becky's jaw stiffen at this last comment. She had a hunch why her best friend was so glum, but she wanted to see if Becky would come out and say it.

She didn't have to wait too long.

"Well, I *wouldn't* have been alone with the kids if *someone* had come in and helped like he volunteered to." Becky picked up a baby doll that had fallen and threw it back in the crib. "You know, *he* was the one to initiate all of this. I wasn't the one who called out of the blue and wanted to get together so we could *talk*." Becky made a motion to symbolize quotations when she said the word "talk."

Natalie shook her head. He had done it again.

She knew trouble was coming the minute Becky came into her classroom that morning. She was grinning and talking breathlessly about how Scott had called and was coming to help with the party and then take her out to lunch—to "talk." Darn that Scott Lawson. It was stunts like this that give men their bad name.

Natalie looked at Becky. "Bec, he's not worth it."

Becky snapped out of her daze but acted as if she hadn't heard Natalie. "At first, I thought he had overslept, but then he was an hour-and-a-half late, and I started to get worried. I ran to the office to see if he'd called and left a message. Cheryl said he hadn't, but for some reason I felt the need to describe him to her—as if that would help her remember a phone message. All I had to say was 'six-two with light brown hair,' and she interrupted me—'and green eyes?' she said."

Those eyes were the first thing Natalie had noticed when she met him, so she wasn't surprised that the secretary remembered them.

"She said she had *seen* him."

"You mean he was actually at the school?" Natalie leaned forward on the desk.

"Not only was he at the school, but he signed in *and* signed out." Becky began to pace the room, her hands unconsciously clenching and unclenching. "She even showed me the sign-in sheet." She slammed a hard-back copy of *The Polar Express* down in the box.

Natalie was thoroughly confused.

"I told him to be here at 9:15. So he was even *early!*" Becky laughed sarcastically, her bewilderment clear as she raised her eyebrows and threw her hands out, palms up.

"That makes no sense. Bec, I know you guys have a history, but I think you just gotta let it go."

"I was going to let it go, but then there was Karen's wedding, and how the heck am I supposed to 'let it go' after he does something like that?" Her eyes were beginning to well up. She gave Natalie a weak smile. "Thanks, Nat. I know this isn't an easy thing for you either." Becky wiped her face with her hands and looked around the room. "I think I've put pretty much everything away, so I'm gonna head home and go for a run—it'll help to clear my head."

Natalie nodded. "Sounds like a plan." She headed toward the door. "Well I'm gonna go and *start* to clean up my room which looks like it was hit by a Category 7 hurricane," she called as she disappeared into the hallway.

Taking one last look around the room, Becky's thoughts drifted to her upcoming weeks of vacation, and Scott Lawson was forgotten—almost.

* * * * *

"I'm not sure how long I'll be, Meg. Maybe an hour," Becky called as she headed for the apartment door. "Bode's coming with me, by the way." The two-year-old black lab looked up at her with his big brown eyes and wagged his tail. He knew that Becky *plus* leash *equals* run.

"Have a good run." Meg waved her hand at Becky. "And Bec." Becky turned around to face her sister.

"Yeah?"

"If you don't run it all out and still need to talk, I'm here."

Becky gave her sister a knowing smile. "Thanks." She closed the door of their apartment and headed for the stairs.

"Let's hit the road, Bod." The energetic black lab looked up when he heard his nickname. He gave her one of his friendly barks. "Okay, we're going." Becky pushed up the sleeve of her Villa Julie College shirt and switched to the chrono mode on her stopwatch. She wrapped Bode's leash firmly around her hand as they made their way down the side street and headed to the main road.

It was Becky's favorite type of winter day—blue sky with puffy white clouds. She was glad she had remembered her sunglasses—the sun seemed so much brighter in the winter. Bode ran at a steady pace about two feet in front of her. She smiled as she thought of their first few runs, if you could call them that. After a good two weeks, Bode had learned to stay with Becky, but all training was forgotten when another dog passed them.

But the worst had been when Scott went running with them. He would run ahead of Becky, egging Bode on, sometimes running backwards and calling the crazy dog's name. Bode loved it, but those runs usually lasted ten minutes, max, because Becky would be dead tired from sprinting the whole time to keep up with the boys. Scott would always give her a hard time, saying she should be able to outlast him since she was a distance runner and he was a sprinter. She would shoot him her deadliest glare, but then he would give her that smile, and she would let him of the hook.

Becky grimaced as she realized that she had let Scott enter her thoughts. Maybe it was for the best, she thought. If she could just get all of her thinking about him out, then maybe she would be able to get him out of her system. Hopeful that this would be the case, she let her thoughts drift back....

They had met in high school when they both ran track for St. Luke's. That was the first year Becky ran track. She remembered riding to the first meet. She was so nervous about running that she felt like she had to go to the bathroom every five minutes. She had sat next to Scott in the second row from the back in the school van. Initially, she was listening to music on her headphones, trying to keep herself as calm as possible. Then

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Scott had reached over, taken one of the headphones off, and asked her what she was listening to. When she told him *Heart*, he smiled and said they were one of his favorite groups, too. They had talked for the rest of the ride, and, as they say, the rest was history.

Although everyone joked about the two of them being more than just friends, nothing like that ever developed—at least not for the first two-and-a-half-years. Looking back, Becky had to admit that at some point, the smile that was so big it caused his ears to move began to give her a different feeling—but they had such a great friendship that she never allowed herself to consider it anything more than that. Then, after winning indoor championships for the third straight year in their senior year, something changed.

Practically the whole track team grabbed a late dinner at *Friendly's* after the meet. Around 11:30, the restaurant closed, and the athletes reluctantly began to go their separate ways. Becky and Scott had driven to the restaurant in Scott's car, so he drove her back to school to pick up her car.

There had never been anything particularly special about the parking lot at St. Luke's High School, but it took on a whole new meaning for Becky and Scott that night. After giving him one last congratulatory hug, Becky had pulled away to see Scott looking at her in a way he never had. Before she knew it, his face was moving closer, and he kissed her, sweaty track uniform and all.

They officially dated from January 9 to May 23, two days after graduation. It had been a "break-up-of-convenience." Scott wasn't sure what he wanted to do or where he wanted to go to college, so he decided to join the Navy for two years. Becky had already been accepted into Villa Julie where she planned to major in Early Childhood Education. Scott didn't think it was fair for Becky to be tied down to someone who wouldn't be around, so he—they—had ended it. It was pretty amicable, but Becky was still hurt and didn't talk to him much that summer. They saw each other once before Scott shipped out. He apologized for hurting her, and she put on a brave face, telling him to be safe. She had shed her tears later at home on Meg's shoulder.

Over the next two years, they struggled to keep in touch, managing to send Christmas cards and infrequent snail mail. After his two years in the Navy, Scott had discovered that he was interested in engineering, so he decided not to re-up but to attend the University of Maryland. They saw each other once that summer before Scott started school. The awkwardness of the breakup had mellowed with the years, and it was beginning to feel like old times. The summer after Becky's graduation, Scott helped her "train" Bode and accompanied her on numerous shopping trips. Then came Karen and Dave's wedding....

Karen and Dave were mutual friends of Becky and Scott in high school. They were both in the wedding party, so at the rehearsal dinner, they decided to go to the wedding together, mainly because it solved the problem of finding dates.

At the reception, Becky and Scott shared a dance with the bride and groom. Unknown to Becky and Scott, Dave and Karen had hidden motives when they requested the dances. When the song ended, Dave and Karen switched partners, insisting that Becky and Scott stay on the dance floor for the next song. Becky and Scott tried to weasel out

of the dance, but when the bride and groom teased that the reason they wouldn't dance was because they were secretly in love with each other, Becky and Scott returned to their spot on the dance floor, set to prove the newlyweds wrong. What they hadn't anticipated was how far their friends were going to test them.

Scott offered his left hand to Becky, and she was about to accept when she heard the opening notes of the song. It was *What About Love* by *Heart*—the closest thing to "their" song. Scott dropped his hand, and Becky felt her face flush. She began to scan the room, searching desperately for an easy exit. She caught Karen's eye and shot her a pleading look. Karen simply gestured with her head toward Scott before turning away to rest her head on Dave's shoulder.

Becky turned back to Scott and found a determined look on his face. He took a step toward her and extended his left hand. Not really in control of her actions, Becky found herself placing her right hand in his and resting her left hand lightly on his shoulder. He slid his other hand around her waist, resting it firmly on the small of her back. Scott began to lead her in a dance with slow, small steps.

Becky couldn't bring herself to look at him. She was afraid that if she did, her face would betray her true emotions and she wouldn't be able to maintain the platonic relationship they were working so hard to save. At one point, she stole a glance at Scott and found him looking at her. They danced that way for the rest of the song, eyes locked on each other. When the song ended, they stood, unmoving on the dance floor. The first one to break the gaze, Scott dropped his hands from her. Finding his voice, he asked Becky if she wanted to get a bit of air. Becky agreed immediately, and the two headed outside...

* * * * *

Becky picked up the pace of her run, knowing she had less than a half-mile to go. She felt as if she had been transported back in time and didn't know if her sudden difficulty in breathing was due to the run or the emotions evoked by her memories.

They had walked around the property. Both of their minds and hearts were racing, and neither one dared to say a word, afraid of what might rush out. They took a seat in the white gazebo just outside the reception hall and finally broke the silence. Just as Becky stood and suggested that they head back inside, she felt Scott's hand on her arm. She turned to face him and found herself being pulled into a kiss, much like five years ago in St. Luke's parking lot. When they separated, Scott apologized and ran back into the reception hall, leaving Becky alone in the gazebo. When she returned to the reception, she was handed a note. *Becky, I had to leave. Talked to Natalie, and she'll give you a ride home. Sorry. Scott.*

That was the last Becky had heard from Scott until last night when he called.

"Hey, Becky."

Becky's mouth went dry when she heard his voice. "Scott?"

"Yeah. Hey, I know—long time."

Becky remained silent.

"Listen, I graduated last week—finally, right?" He chuckled, nervously. "Anyway, I don't start my job until after Christmas, so I've just been kicking around."

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He didn't usually babble like this, so Becky knew something was up. Suddenly, she was worried. "Is everything okay?"

She could almost hear his smile over the phone. "Yeah, everything's fine, Bec. I just—I wanted to talk to you, and—I was wondering if maybe I could take you to lunch tomorrow, so we can talk."

Becky tried to stay calm, but she could feel her face grow warm with excitement. "Um, that would be great." Then she remembered. "But my kids have a holiday party tomorrow, so I don't think I'd be very good company."

"Oh, I see."

Becky couldn't help but smile. He sounded...disappointed.

"Well, could I take you to lunch after that?"

He was being persistent. Interesting. "Yeah, that would be okay, I guess. But I'm not sure when I'll be done." Becky realized she wasn't being very accommodating, but she liked being the one playing hard to get this time. After all, *he* had called her.

"Okay, well could you use any help with the party?"

"I guess—yeah, I could."

"All right, then how about I come in and help out with the party and clean up, and *then* I'll take you out to lunch." He sounded satisfied with his plan.

Becky hesitated. "You're *sure* you want to help with a holiday party for kindergartners?"

"No sweat, Bec."

"I guarantee it *will* be crazy," she warned, wanting to make sure he was aware of what he was getting into.

He wasn't intimidated. "So what time do you want me there?"

"How about 9:15?"

"Okay, sounds good." Scott didn't sound like he had anything more to say, but he didn't sound like he wanted to hang up either.

"Well, I'd love to chat, but I've got some last minute plans to get ready for tomorrow." Becky looked at the piles of papers that covered her bedroom floor.

"Right. Okay then, I'll see you tomorrow at 9:15 for the party."

"And lunch, right?" Becky twisted the phone cord around her finger.

"And lunch. To talk. See you tomorrow, Bec." With that, he hung up.

Becky sat there for a second, the phone still pressed against her ear.

Meg leaned against the doorframe of Becky's room. "What was that about?"

"Scott. He's coming in tomorrow to help with the party and then taking me to lunch to talk." Becky couldn't contain her excitement.

Meg rolled her eyes as she stood up straight and walked toward her younger sister. "Be careful, Bec. He's already messed with you twice."

"I know that. But he sounded different this time." Becky scolded herself for sounding so pathetic, but there *had* been something different about his voice.

"Be careful, Bec," her sister repeated.

"Don't worry so much, Meg." Becky said....

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The finish line was in sight, less than 100 meters away. Becky gave it everything she had. Even Bode seemed surprised by how strong the kick was. When she finished, she bent over and put her hands on her knees. She took a couple deep breaths to ease the burning in her chest, then stood.

As she headed toward the pavilion about a half-mile away, she didn't notice the young man who had just entered the park. A young woman who passed the man did a double-take to get another look at his gorgeous green eyes, but all of his attention was focused on the figure walking toward the pavilion.

* * * * *

By the time she reached the pavilion, her heartbeat had slowed, and she felt steady enough to take a seat on one of the benches. She unwound some of Bode's leash, allowing him to wander a little further. Bode barked. Becky couldn't see him, but the leash meandered around a large evergreen tree, so she followed it and found Bode standing before a Nativity scene.

A slight breeze came up, blowing some of the straw from the barn floor onto Becky and Bode.

"I always hated those crosswinds. They came up at the worst time—especially in the middle of a turn."

Becky recognized the voice immediately but stayed standing with her back to him. "Well, when it comes up, you just have to put your head down and push through it," she answered, her voice, surprisingly, betraying no emotion.

"That's good advice. Who told you that?" Scott took a few steps forward.

Becky's eyes burned with intensity as she continued to stare at the Virgin Mother. "You," she answered simply, turning her head to look at him. His hands were shoved in his pockets, and his thumbs were hooked through his belt loops. His head dropped a bit when he heard her response. He studied his shoes for a second before looking up at the tops of the evergreen trees. He looked drained. Becky felt some satisfaction at that realization.

She turned back to face the Nativity scene. Scott stole a glance in her direction and decided to make his move. "Bec," he began.

She held up her hand for him to stop. "Whatever you're going to say, I don't want to hear it. You've yanked me around enough in our years of—whatever this is. I'm done with it, Scott." She looked him straight in the eye.

She turned toward Bode. He was standing stoically, tail between his legs, as if he sensed the tension and knew to be quiet. She knelt down to pat his silky head. Looking into his chocolate eyes, she assured him, "It's okay, boy. Let's head back."

"Becky, you're not leaving," Scott declared. He had come up behind her.

Becky looked up at him, ready to refute his demand, but the words were lost when she saw the determination in his eyes.

"I've been working on this all day, and you're going to listen to me." Realizing the imperative tone of his last comment, he added softly, "Please listen to me."

She stood, taking her sunglasses off her head and then returning them to their spot,

collecting loose hairs in the process. She looked expectantly at Scott.

Scott took a deep breath. He put his left hand in his pants pocket and ran his other hand over his short hair. Becky fought back a smile as she recognized one of his nervous gestures. She was making him squirm.

"Look, there's so many things to say, but I'm just going to focus on today for now. The other stuff can be explained later."

Becky was about to protest but stopped when he raised his right hand. "Just let me do this, please." Becky complied with his request. He surprised her a bit, taking a deliberate step toward her so that he was only inches from her. The softness of his voice caught her off guard as well. "I came to school today, planning to help with the party and then take you to lunch where I would explain why I left you at Karen and Dave's wedding. So I signed in at the desk in the main school building and headed across the parking lot to your building. I reached your door at exactly 9:15 and was about to come in—"

"And what—you saw me and my beauty left you mute, so you turned and high-tailed it out?" Becky couldn't keep the sarcasm and anger from her voice. "Don't feed me something like that, Lawson. We both know that's a load of crap."

He realized she was angrier than he had expected. Choosing to ignore her outburst, he continued, "I was about to come in when I saw you talking to one of the kids in your class. I don't know what was going on, but the boy was bawling his eyes out. You were so calm with him and said some things to him—I couldn't hear them because you spoke so softly. All I know is that kid was all smiles five minutes later, building a tower of blocks with some buddies."

Becky thought back to that morning. What was Scott talking about? Gabe. He had come in that morning, extremely upset because his mom had an emergency c-section. He was scared that he wouldn't see her again. *That* was what had stopped Scott from entering the room? So he was afraid of the tears of a five year old. What had she ever seen in him?

Scott watched a variety of emotions play across Becky's face. "I wasn't afraid of that kid's tears."

Startled by his insight, Becky looked up at him.

"I had just never seen you like that with a kid before, and I was blown away. I lost all of my nerve and knew I had to get out of there. I walked around the school for another ten minutes or so, signed out, and left."

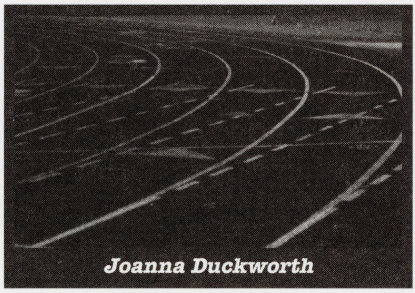
"I still don't understand what made you lose your nerve." Becky shook her head. She felt more confused, if that was possible, than she had earlier that day.

"It was almost the same reason that I ran away at the reception." The earnestness of his voice made her look at him, and something about his eyes made it impossible for her to turn away.

"Almost?" she asked tentatively.

"At the reception, when I kissed you, I realized you were someone I could see myself falling in love with, and I got scared because I hadn't expected to feel like that about you."

"I was the constant, comfortable friend and wasn't good enough for you to take that kind of chance on, right?" Becky laughed cynically, tears running down her cheeks. She


Joanna Duckworth

didn't care if he saw them now. "This is ridiculous, Scott, we've been dancing like this for *years*, and I won't—"

"Becky, I'm in love with you." He said it so firmly, like it was a fact.

Dumbfounded, Becky stared at him. Had he really just said what she thought he said? "Let me see if I get this. You were scared at the reception and this morning, and now, all of a sudden, you're not *and* you're in love with me?"

"No, I was scared then—"

Becky turned away. She had heard enough, and even though part of her had always wanted him to say he loved her, they had messed up too many times.

"And I still am."

Her wandering thoughts came to a dead stop. She turned slowly and faced him, a cautious look on her face.

Scott began speaking before he lost her again. "But I've decided that I'd rather be scared about giving this a shot than be safe and walk away."

Becky tried to digest his words. She knew he was being honest, but she still couldn't give in. "How am I supposed to trust that this time is for real?"

Her eyes pleaded with him to give her a convincing answer. Suddenly, she sensed a change in him. He lifted his head and looked right at her. Closing the distance between them, he pulled her to him and kissed her.

Not wanting to be swayed by a simple kiss, Becky tried to fight him. But it was useless. In her mind, she was taken back to the kisses in the parking lot and gazebo, but at the same moment, she realized that this kiss was different somehow.

Scott pulled back. He took her face in his hands and looked into her teary brown eyes. "I love you, Bec."

Looking back into his eyes, Becky knew he meant it. Tears of joy ran down her cheeks onto his hands. Unable to resist the urge, a smile slowly formed on her face. "I should have gotten Gabe to cry a lot sooner if this is the result."

Scott laughed. He hugged her to him, wrapping his arms around her and resting his chin on the top of her head.

The softness of his voice touched her. He reached toward her face. Becky thought he was going to caress her cheek, but instead, he took something from her hair—a piece of straw.

She looked at what was in his hand. "Well, I guess it wasn't the last straw," she said with a smile.

Scott's eyebrows furrowed in puzzlement.

She took the piece of straw from his hand and held it a second. Releasing it to the wind, she turned back to Scott and smiled. "That means I love you, too."

Kelly Newcomb

46

You're Chocolate to Me

Smooth weighted coco brown
Deep moist heavy on my tongue
Sinfully thick, making my lips hum.

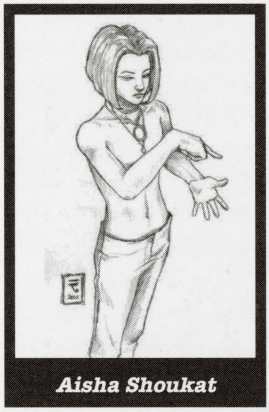
Indulging in lust,
Fragrantly sweet and melodious.

Bold and beautiful to my mouth,
Sweetness of sugar air from the south.

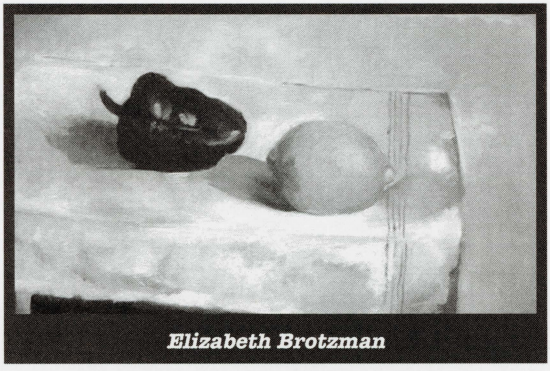
Kiss me.

With your words and love song,
Let it sing poetically long.

It tastes like the jungle mist wild and sweet,
Sensuous kiss makes the evening complete.
Felicia Watty



Aisha Shoukat



Elizabeth Brotzman

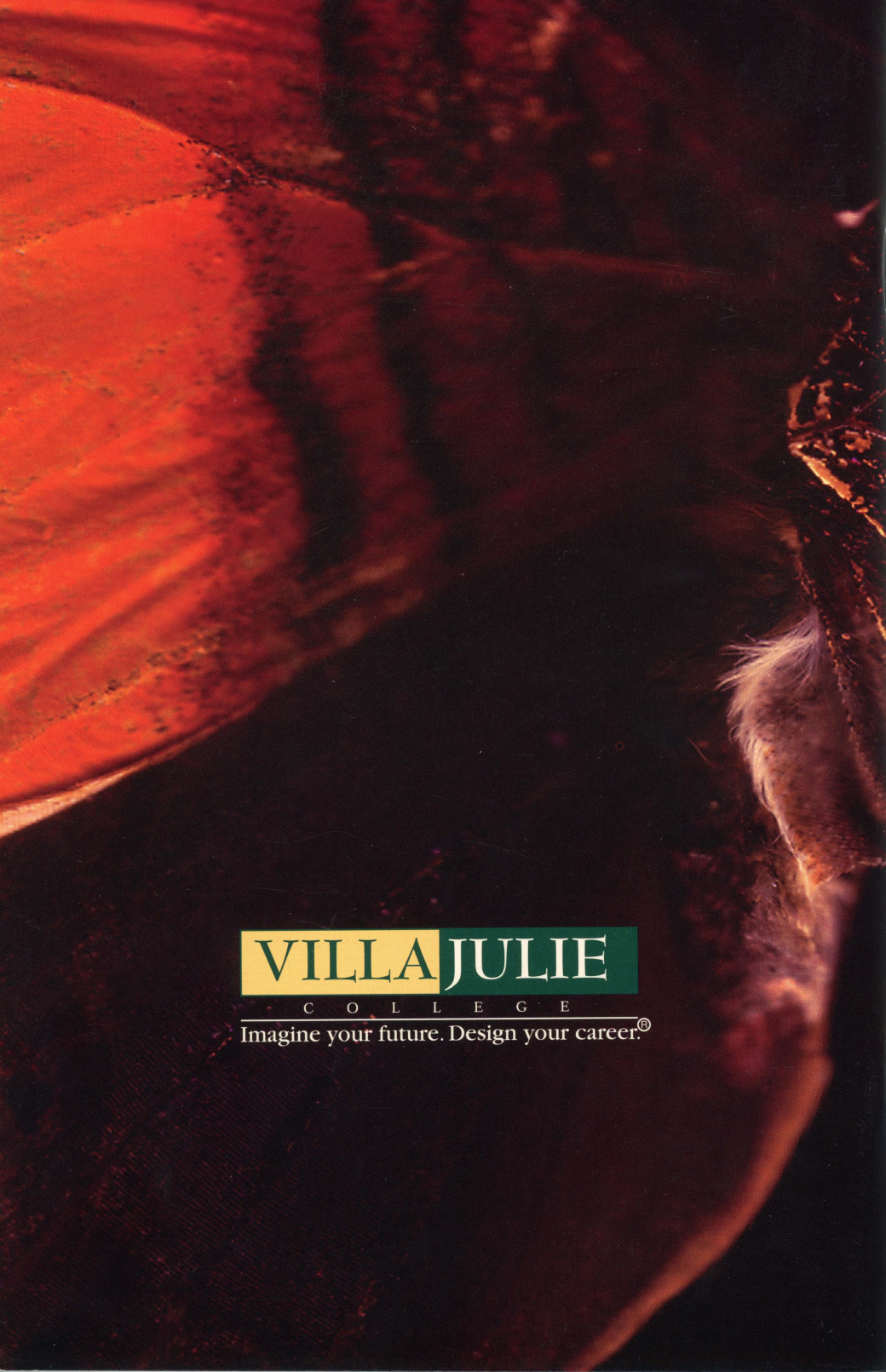
Bryan Goetz

Prophecy

I have no more use for prophecy.
The cards, the runes, the signs,
the old gypsy women
staring at me hard through firelight:
I've known them all.
But I'm tired of seeing the same message
laid out in front of me, telling me what I already know,
or should.

Prophecy has made me think,
but it has not made me act.
So until I can learn
to *change*,
Let My Guard Down,
And be what I want,
I have no more use for prophecy.

Heidi Shepler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